

Understanding Compliance Inspections

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) administers the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) through the Animal Care (AC) program. AC's mission is to provide leadership in establishing standards of humane care and treatment of animals and to monitor and achieve compliance with those standards. This is accomplished primarily by inspecting regulated facilities, but also through educational and cooperative efforts.

By becoming licensed or registered under the AWA, all owners and managers agree to comply with the regulations and standards of the AWA and to allow unannounced AC compliance inspections at their facilities. It is AC's goal to produce inspection reports that communicate an accurate picture of the compliance status of the facility. To make the inspection process as effective as possible, AC wants you to know what you can expect from AC as well as what AC expects from you.

What Can You Expect From AC?

- Your facility will usually be inspected during normal business hours, though inspections will be unannounced. Only on rare occasions, if serious complaints have been received, will AC conduct inspections outside normal business hours.
- You have the right to request identification. Each inspector should display an official USDA identification card upon request.
- You have the right to know exactly what the inspector identifies as noncompliant and why. As you and the inspector proceed, he or she will point out the areas of concern or noncompliance. The inspector will provide you with the exact section of the AWA regulations and standards that pertains to the noncompliant item.
- You are free to respond to the inspection report. Although not necessary, written responses should be sent to your AC regional office and will be filed in your official file. Do not write responses on the inspection report itself.
- You have the right to appeal inspection findings.

A written explanation of the facts or interpretation in question should be sent to your AC regional office. You can expect a timely response to your written appeal.

- An appeal of inspection findings should never result in reprisal. These differences of opinion are a part of regulatory oversight, and AC inspectors understand that facilities have the right to appeal inspection results.

What Does AC Expect From You?

- You are responsible for having a knowledgeable person available to participate in the inspection. This person must be at least 18 years of age and have access to all required records and all applicable areas of the facility. To help ensure availability, update your inspector with your normal hours of operation. Be sure to discuss this at precensing inspections.
- You are responsible for discussing inspection findings with your inspector so that you understand any problem areas and the requirements of the AWA regulations and standards. You should review the report carefully including the dates for required corrections.
- You are responsible for signing the inspection report to signify your receipt. Your signature does not imply agreement with the contents of the report.
- You are responsible for ensuring that the reports are distributed to all appropriate personnel at the facility so that the necessary corrections can be made.
- You are responsible for correcting noncompliant items.
- Should it become apparent that you will be unable to meet a correction deadline for a noncompliance, you are responsible for requesting a reasonable extension before the original correction date has elapsed. The request should be made in writing to your AC regional office.
- You are responsible for communicating changes in personnel or activities that affect the inspection process to the inspector or the AC regional office.

Additional Information

For more information about compliance inspections or AC, please contact us at one of the locations below.

Headquarters

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